



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
60B WESTON STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06120-1551

James D. McGaughey
Executive Director

Phone 1/860-297-4307
Confidential Fax 1/860-297-4305

**Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
Before the Judiciary Committee**

Submitted by: James D. McGaughey
Executive Director
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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment on **Raised Bill No. 6628, An Act Concerning the Safe Use of Electronic Defense Weapons by Peace Officers**. This bill would set minimum training requirements for police officers who carry conducted energy devices such as Tasers and other electronic defense weapons, ensure that medical assistance is provided to individuals on whom the devices have been used, and require police agencies to develop policies and record-keeping procedures regarding the use of such devices. Our Office supports these measures.

There is no question but that Tasers and other electronic defense weapons have a legitimate place amongst the threat-management tools that are available to law enforcement. However, like other instruments that are intended to provide a non-lethal alternative for police officers facing circumstances where physical intervention may be necessary, but the use of deadly force is not justified, these weapons can produce unintended harm. In fact, their use has been implicated in a number of deaths, both in the U.S. and abroad. Last year the American Heart Association published the results of a study which found that the use of electronic defense weapons can produce certain types of cardiac arrhythmias which lead to unconsciousness and, without prompt intervention, can prove fatal.

Across the country, advocates for people with cognitive, communication and psychiatric disabilities are calling for the types of training and policy development envisioned in this bill. Our sister agency in Vermont has recently entered into a mediation agreement with the Vermont State Police following an incident where a slightly built man with Down syndrome, who simply did not understand what the police were telling him to do, was shot with a Taser and severely traumatized. That mediation agreement calls for much the same type of training and policy development described in this bill.

Taser-related fatalities have occurred in Connecticut. Research cited by the ACLU- CT indicates that since 2005, there have been eleven Taser-related deaths here, some of which involved people who were either known to have psychiatric diagnoses or were exhibiting signs of psychiatric distress. Our Office is also aware of recent instances where Tasers were used by officers responding to distress calls in group homes and other programs for people with intellectual or behavioral health disabilities. As Taser use increases, the risks involved, and the grounds for justifiable use of these weapons needs to be more clearly delineated. We also need a better handle on the frequency and circumstances surrounding their deployment. I urge you to act favorably on this important bill.

Thank you for your attention. If there are any questions, or if our Office can assist the Committee as it considers that proposal, please feel free to contact me.